
Employee Motivation

CHARLES H. GOODMAN

THE PROBLEM OF MOTIVATING other people is probably as old as the history of man himself, or at least as old as that point in time when man found he could only accomplish certain tasks by combining his efforts or abilities with those of other individuals. With the onset of this realization of the value and need for cooperative effort, the problem was further compounded when larger numbers of people were needed to accomplish a task. The situation then arose of providing direction to such a multiple effort; and with direction, i.e., someone telling others what to do or overseeing the effort, there came the matter of how to motivate these people. The old saying, one can lead a horse to water but one cannot make him drink, was and remains the crux of the motivation problem.

The whip, the lash, cajolery, persuasion, bribery, promises, pleadings, and numerous other techniques have been and are still being used in an attempt to motivate others. Yet, despite our long confrontation with this problem, we are still far from understanding or knowing how to motivate others. Motivation is a matter further complicated by the particular period of time, the particular circumstances and the particular economic conditions surrounding an act. Under conditions of prosperity and full employment, such as the U.S.A. has experienced, the problem of motivating others may become a far more difficult task, particularly in a free society. It is not uncommon today to hear employers ask: How does one get his employees to be genuinely concerned about their work, to take real interest in what they are doing, to accept challenges, to take pride in what they are doing, to want to accomplish at a high level, to want to assume responsibility?

While the questions asked are simple, straightforward and real, the answers are inversely complex and contaminated by factors little

Charles H. Goodman is Associate Dean and Professor, School of Government and Public Administration, The American University, Washington, D.C.

understood or even known. While the questions raised are known to be related to the area of motivation, this is an area which has received some systematic psychological study only in the past seventy years. It will be the purpose of this article to explore and examine some of the knowledge that has been acquired and to see how this knowledge may be applied to the matter at hand.

Let us begin by examining the problem of motivation in an organizational setting, for it is here that our particular interests are most concerned. Analytically and for simplicity's sake, one can discern five key elements which play a major role in motivation. These are the employer, the employee, the work environment, the goals of the employer and the goals of the other members of the organization (the workers, supervisors, and managers). It is the interplay of these factors that influences the problem of motivation and determines the outcome.

Let us then make some quick observations of this organizational setting for it is here, within these bounds, that the drama is played. If one observes the work place, one can see people engaged in a variety of activities. Some of these activities may seem to be related to the activities of others, while others may seem to be quite independent. One catches a glimpse of a particular individual who appears to be telling others what to do, or of other people near each other engaged in conversation, while carrying on some activity. The total effect is one of much activity about the scene. This activity—whether similar or different; whether it is writing, talking or making machines function; or whether it is unobservable activity of thought—all has purpose. The purpose or purposes may be different for different organizations, but one basic fact emerges regardless of the kind of organization it may be—all organizations have purpose, and all of the activities that take place within the organization are deemed essential by someone to accomplish the organization's purpose.

In seeking to accomplish these purposes or goals, the manager has at his command the following resources or tools: ideas, money, materials, time and people. In using these resources, he will eventually find that it is the individual, the worker, who must put these resources to work for him, and that the best and most effective use of these resources will depend upon how these workers use them. The condition which emerges is that *one can only get things done with people, with one's workers*: unfortunately it is a fact overlooked by too many supervisors or managers. While this may be overlooked, another factor emerges which is widely noticed; that is, this worker can be highly

Employee Motivation

variable, inconsistent and unpredictable. How well the job is performed is affected by this variability and depends upon how well the worker is self-motivated or how well the supervisor can motivate him.

Lest one gain from this description a picture of uncertainty and unpredictability of output, it is important to add that management cannot function or accept such a condition and, therefore, imposes standards of productivity or output. In the factory these are most readily known in terms of piece rates or units of production. Despite these requirements by management, it is well known that workers withhold production; that is, workers may well have the ability to produce more than that required of them. This problem of level of production is far more amorphous in the work situation where the professional person is engaged. How does one measure output in these situations and by what standards? One looks in vain for answers. Attempts have been made and will continue to be made to find solutions, but most of the attempts so far have crumbled or floundered because of the subjectivity involved in establishing such criteria. To date no precise mathematical formulae for determining such standards have been found, and even if they were, it is highly questionable whether they would be equally acceptable to managers and workers. At best, in the business and industrial situation, the worker is considered as a cost factor in the grand total of production costs. Successful companies approximate or determine some level of productivity needed from the worker to consider this element a profitable aspect of the overall operation. In state, national or urban governmental work where services are rendered to the public, even the cost concept of the worker as he relates to productivity or profitability becomes lost.

One must add an additional factor to this sketch of the organizational habitat. First, some psychological studies have shown that people of ability can generally perform better than those of lesser ability at a ratio of two to one, and in some instances, even at a ratio far higher than two to one. Yet, empirical evidence in the work place will tend to show most workers functioning at some overall average level of performance despite their levels of ability. We are charged by some writers as having become a society of average mediocrity, of organization men, and of individuals who have lost their identity and individuality. Social pressures within the work groups or unions, individual attitudes, individual levels of motivation and aspiration, and other elements all play their role in this leveling effect. Many studies of workers have

disclosed that only a small percentage of workers feel they work near their full capacity.

What then are some of the factors that lead to this situation and what can be done to motivate people? Earlier five factors were mentioned as playing a key role in the motivation area. At this point, I mention two of the vital ones—the supervisor and the employee.

First, let us repeat quickly some points already made. All organizations have purpose. A library is an organization having the purpose or purposes of providing a professional service to the public or to special publics. All of its employees are then the means by which this service will be provided. How well this service will be rendered will depend upon how well the various activities are carried out by the employees of the library. How adequately these employees will perform will depend upon their own self-motivation or how well they have been motivated by their supervisors.

Even if there is satisfaction with the work being done today, it is only momentary for the accomplishments of today merely become the base for the improvements of tomorrow. The overwhelming characteristic of work in our time is change, and the only instruments capable of making these changes are the managers, the supervisors and the workers. There is only one effective way to get these changes made and that is to influence employees to want to make them.

How do we do this? What are some of the factors involved? First, it is important that we never forget that it is the individual, the worker, who is being asked to make this change and that it is the employee who is in control of the situation. It is the worker who must make the final decision to make this change and he will determine how much or how little he will do. The supervisor, in the extreme position, can fire the worker, but the question then arises as to what this will accomplish.

A second point that must be made is the point so well stated by Drucker: "In hiring a worker one cannot hire a hand; its owner always comes with it . . . one can hire only a whole man rather than any part thereof."¹ And when one hires this whole man or woman, one has hired a personality, attitudes, motives, levels of aspiration, goals, ambitions, needs, egos, roles, abilities, interests, values and many other factors.

If supervisors are to be effective in motivating their workers they must have some understanding of these factors. Gage feels that the better one understands people the better one can get along with them and the better one can motivate them.² The supervisor who wants to

Employee Motivation

be able to understand his people must first seek some understanding of himself. What are his own problems, his worries, his ambitions, his prejudices? How do these factors affect his own behavior and in turn so vitally affect his workers? Is he conscious of the possibility that it may be his own behavior which is producing the kind of response from his workers which he does not like or want? Unless we seek some understanding of ourselves in terms of how we affect our workers, we may experience considerable difficulty in motivating them.

Now let us briefly consider the other half of this duality of the supervisor motivating the employee. This worker has a personality which is defined in Menninger's words as "all that a man has been—is—and hopes to be."³ This is the total person—the way he thinks and feels, his likes and hates, his abilities and interests, his values, and his hopes and desires. It is here in this work place where his hopes and ambitions may be fulfilled or smashed. It is here where his aspirations may be achieved and challenged or where he may develop frustration, aggression, hostility, and apathy. It is this work place which consumes so large a part of his life and either provides fulfillment of his needs or miserably fails to meet them.

Searching deeper to understand this worker, one can see him as a "needs system" seeking to satisfy his wants. Maslow sees the individual in our society and culture as one having a hierarchy of needs.⁴ These move from a base of meeting physiological requirements for survival to the apex of self-accomplishments in one's own right. Between these bounds he traces the need for safety and protection from bodily harms and the next level of dependence, the need to feel secure and to be able to depend upon others. This is followed by the need for independence, to be able to stand on one's own two feet, to be respected, to have self-esteem. And lastly this need hierarchy is capped by the need for self-realization, the need to achieve and accomplish. Gratification of our basic needs frees us to move on to the next higher level. In this concept one moves from the area of physiological requirements to the psychological needs. McGregor points this up clearly when he states, "Man lives by bread alone, when there is no bread."⁵ He points to this area of higher needs as the place where managers and supervisors fail to motivate their workers.⁶ He points out that today most employees can generally fulfill their basic physiological needs, whereupon they attempt to seek fulfillment of their needs in the areas of self-expression, recognition, having some voice in job affairs, doing something worthwhile, and demanding a chance to grow. Often these needs

are largely overlooked by the supervisor and the result is frustration for the worker.

Fundamentally, the problem can be raised in question form as follows: How can we apply the knowledge we have gained to the problem of motivating people? In posing this question, certain conditions must be recognized: 1) One cannot blanket all workers by a general formula. Motivation is an individual matter, and one needs to know and understand as best one can the individual who is to be motivated. 2) One will not be able to motivate others for any length of time if such motivation is used for personal or selfish reasons, i.e., if people are being used for one's own gain. 3) A most important condition, one that cannot be overlooked, is that individuals have their own goals, objectives and aspirations. Unfortunately and all too frequently, only the organization's goals are considered. True, these are important, but equally important is the need to help the individual seek to achieve his goals within the context of the organization's goals. It is a concept of integration, of the realization of individual goals within the larger framework of the organization. It is possible, and it becomes an essential element in motivating others.

Now let us bear in mind a concept set forth earlier, namely, that when a need is satisfied, it is no longer a motivating force. Employers will frequently say, "I pay my people good wages, they have good benefits. Why don't they produce better, and why aren't they more interested in their work?" Essentially what has happened is that their physiological needs are satisfied, and the problem becomes one of meeting the higher social and psychological needs: the needs of association, acceptance by one's fellow workers, of belonging, as well as the needs of his ego—self-confidence, self-esteem, the need for status, accomplishment and respect. These needs, unlike the lower level needs, are rarely fulfilled. Most organizations today, designed on the basic scientific management concepts of direction and control, rarely provide for meeting such needs. It is here then that attention must be directed if we are to be able to motivate with any degree of success. While employers cannot provide these higher level needs to employees in the same sense as they provide salaries or income for the physiological needs, they can provide the climate wherein the employee can seek to satisfy these needs.

Let us now turn to some specifics. First, let us look at a psychological law called the Law of Active Participation. Essentially, it states that when a person actively participates in a learning situation, he tends to

Employee Motivation

acquire the response far more rapidly, and that these response patterns tend to be more stably formed than when he remains passive. By participation, we mean the person is "task involved." But the question comes to the fore—is he ego involved? That is, are his talents involved, does he understand his work, is he working well with his group? If he is, then there will be identification with his job. He will be absorbed, he will be an active participant. If, on the other hand, he does not find his work meaningful and he is not actively participating, he becomes *reactive* and hostility, aggression, and apathy will follow. Allport has stated that "people must have a hand in saving themselves; they cannot and will not be saved from the outside."⁷ What is being considered here is the factor getting the employee involved and participating in seeking to accomplish objectives. This does not imply, as some would suggest, that employees are involved in all decision-making. It does imply the involvement of employees in decision-making where the outcome involves them as a group or individually. This principle of ego involvement is brilliantly shown by Coch and French in their study⁸ of the Harwood Manufacturing Company. Their experiment was well designed and controlled and it demonstrated how a "failure group" can, by the method of ego involvement and participation, become a success group. In this area of ego involvement and participation lies one of the most important tools of motivation which the supervisor needs to use actively and vigorously.

Along with the above concept flows the process of giving greater freedom and responsibility to the individual to direct his own activities for the accomplishment of organizational objectives. At the same time, this will provide the individual with the opportunity to meet his own egoistic needs. Along with this one can allow the individual to enlarge his job responsibilities and more fully to utilize his abilities. Here one is providing the opportunity of challenge, and the environment for accomplishment, and again one sees conditions being provided for the meeting of higher level needs.

Now let us explore one last set of factors in the problem of application of our knowledge to motivation. Let us examine the role and impact of the supervisor on what takes place in the work situation. Likert, reporting on the studies made by the University of Michigan on worker productivity,⁹ found that the workers of units having high levels of productivity reacted differently to their supervisor than did the members of low producing units. How did these higher producing workers see their supervisor? They saw their supervisor as helpful,

supportive, and friendly to them. They found him a kind, but also a firm person. They saw him as a just person who was equally concerned about the company and his workers. He had confidence in their motives and looked upon them as individuals of integrity; he treated them with trust rather than with suspicion. He had high expectations of their performance, he expected much and was confident they would not disappoint him. He endeavored to train them well for their jobs and help them become proficient for jobs at the next level. He assisted employees not performing at expected standards. He was a good planner and scheduled work well for the group. He developed his workers into a team with high levels of group loyalty by using group participation methods. He was interested in their ideas and was prepared to do something about them.

Finally there is the matter of appraisal. Ratings and evaluations of workers have long been in use. In general, they have not been very successful, and much of the cause is related to the fact that they have been used critically, destructively, and with little sound data to support the evaluation. Within this process of appraisal, however, there lies good potential for motivation of the worker. But first, it becomes necessary that we reverse the attitude that the appraisal process is destructive. It must be used to allow the employee to set objectives or goals for himself and his work. It can be used to allow the individual to evaluate himself, or, as in the case of General Electric, IBM, General Mills, and others, it can be used as a process of self-evaluation by the employee as well as his supervisor. This is then followed by a discussion with both parties and a plan of action for both supervisor and employee. Regardless of specific technique, the fundamental factor is that evaluations become a constructive developmental approach which can be vitally effective in the motivational process.

In conclusion, one can see the supervisor as one of the prime forces in the motivational process. His prime role is one of developing people who want to participate spontaneously and cooperatively in reaching both organizational and personal goals.

References

1. Drucker, Peter F. *The Practice of Management*. New York, Harper, 1954, p. 262.
2. Gage, N. L. "Accuracy of Social Perception and Effectiveness of Interpersonal Relations," *Journal of Personality*, 22:128-41, Sept. 1953.
3. Menninger, William C., and Levinson, Harvey. *Human Understanding in*

Employee Motivation

Industry; A Guide for Supervisors. Chicago, Science Research Associates, 1956, p. 17.

4. Maslow, A. H. "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review*, 50:370-96, July 1943.

5. McGregor, Douglas, *The Human Side of Enterprise*. New York, McGraw-Hill, 1960, p. 36.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 36-42.

7. Allport, Gordon W. "The Psychology of Participation." In Schuyler Dean Hoslett, ed. *Human Factors in Management*. New York, Harper, 1946, p. 259.

8. Coch, Lester, and French, John R. P., Jr. "Overcoming Resistance to Change," *Human Relations*, 1:512-32, Aug. 1948.

9. Likert, Rensis. *New Patterns of Management*. New York, McGraw-Hill, 1961, p. 101.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

Bales, Robert Freed. *Personality and Interpersonal Behavior*. New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970.

Blake, Robert R., and Mouton, Jane S. *The Managerial Grid; Key Orientations for Achieving Production through People*. Houston, Tex., Gulf Pub. Co., 1964.

Campbell, John P., et al. *Managerial Behavior, Performance and Effectiveness*. New York, McGraw-Hill, 1970.

Dalton, Gene W., comp. *Organizational Change and Development* (Organizational Behavior and Administration Series). Gene W. Dalton and Paul R. Lawrence, eds. Homewood, Ill., R. D. Irwin, 1970.

Hall, Calvin S., and Lindzey, Gardner. *Theories of Personality*. 2d ed. New York, Wiley, 1970.

Levy, Ronald B. *Human Relations: A Conceptual Approach*. Scranton, Pa., International Textbook Co., 1969.

Marrow, Alfred J., et al. *Management by Participation; Creating a Climate for Personal and Organizational Development*. New York, Harper & Row, 1967.

Maslow, Abraham H. *Eupsychian Management; A Journal* (The Irwin-Dorsey Series in Behavioral Science). Homewood, Ill., R. D. Irwin, 1965.

———. *Motivation and Personality*. 2d ed. New York, Harper & Row, 1970.

McGregor, Douglas. *Leadership and Motivation; Essays*. Cambridge, Mass., M.I.T. Press, 1966.

McLarny, William J., and Berliner, William M. *Management Training, Cases and Principles*. 5th ed. Homewood, Ill., R. D. Irwin, 1970.

Neff, Walter S. *Work and Human Behavior*. New York, Atherton Press, 1968.

Schein, Edgar H. *Organizational Psychology* (Foundations of Modern Psychology Series). Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, 1965.

Scott, William G. *Organization Theory; A Behavioral Analysis for Management* (The Irwin Series in Management). Homewood, Ill., R. D. Irwin, 1967.

Sutermeister, Robert A., ed. *People and Productivity* (McGraw-Hill Series in Management). 2d ed. New York, McGraw-Hill, 1969.